

May 17, 1978

To: MLS
From: RC

Subject: Attached Briefing Paper for Newsom on Argentina

The attached paper prepared by INR is an accurate presentation of the human rights situation in Argentina and a good basis for discussion.

However, some of its conclusions and implications are misleading:

1) It appears to support the view (or lead up to the view) that the US should not press for an accounting of the disappeared, since this would be a fruitless thing to do (see page 4). This view has been advocated by the DCM and presumably the Ambassador. (It is opposed by T. Harris.)

Not pressing for an accounting (in addition to supposedly helping to improve US - Argentine relations) appears to be based on the assumption that "most Argentines...believe that terrorists are receiving their due and will want to put the 'mistakes' suffered by non-terrorist victims behind them." That is what the Argentines are arguing and the US Embassy presumably agreeing with.

This assumption is contradicted by the following:
a) the innumerable letters from the relatives and friends of the disappeared received by our office, by ARA, by the Embassy, and by the White House. These letters call for an accounting. They do not express "good riddance" to those who disappeared *or a desire to put the past behind them.*

b) In La Prensa of May 7 (see attached new cable), an open letter to President Videla was printed as a full-page ad listing the names of 2,592 disappeared and urging an accounting. The ad was paid for by many Argentine people and sponsored jointly by three human rights organizations.

c) The need of the military to harass, abduct and even murder those who ask for an accounting - the mothers and the nuns being the most dramatic example - exemplifying the intense feeling on the subject in Argentina.

Furthermore, as Tex Harris has pointed out to HAN, the US should not be pursuing a policy at variance with the major human rights organizations in Argentina, not to speak of the Argentine Church and the Holy See. In addition, Amnesty International USA on May 18 launched a campaign against political imprisonment, torture, disappearance and executions in Argentina with vigils at the offices of the public relations firm hired in the US to improve the Argentine human rights image.

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Tex notes that the disappearance issue is "a powerful tactical tool, even if we agree that there is only an outside chance that the GOA will ever account for the persons it knows to have been killed...It is their Achilles Heel and we should push on it as part of our effort to urge them towards normalization."

(Frankly, families in Argentina are probably sufficiently frightened so that they may not press for an accounting, although this does not seem to bear out the facts. Other families also from fright may give out the signal that "x" was taken, but leave the rest of us alone -- a far cry from "good riddance.")

2. The briefing paper ends too negatively, stating that "US pressure alone, unsupported by other governments and private lenders and investors, is unlikely to carry decisive weight with the Argentines." If this view is carried to its logical conclusion, it could be argued that the US should therefore resume military assistance to Argentina since its unilateral efforts have proved unproductive.

We must therefore point out that the human rights improvements that have occurred (outlined on page 2 - decline in rate of disappearances, release of prisoners, publication of prisoners lists, reintroduction and partial implementation of right of option, action on US interest cases - Timmerman, Vogler, Deutch, attempts to regularize detention procedures and return counter-terrorist troops to normal military activities) have been in part the result of US pressure. This pressure must therefore continue.

Furthermore, US initiatives to multilateralize pressure on Argentina must be given time to produce results. On page 7, the briefing paper notes that "in retaliation for Argentina's failure to explain the disappearance of two French nuns...the French government withdrew two prestigious but essentially meaningless training slots." We have just cabled the US Embassy in Paris to explore French attitudes in this connection. The European community in April made a formal demarche to the Argentine Government on behalf of citizens of the European Community who have disappeared or been detained in Argentina. In June when the World Soccer Cup matches take place, the European press and public will focus on Argentina. Why not wait and see if pressure builds in Europe for more drastic action.

If we back down on Argentina, our singling out of Uruguay, Paraguay and Chile will appear highly politicized and will serve to fuel the critics who argue that US human rights policy is focused on countries where major US interests are not at stake.

5/18
DEPARTMENT OF STATE

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20520

Robert L. Belding file assigned for
May 18, 1978

TO: HA - Assistant Secretary Derian

This paper, prepared by Jim
Buchanan of my staff, has been
provided to ARA/ECA for inclusion
in briefing materials for
Under Secretary Newsom.

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Hunter Estep
Hunter L. Estep
INR/RAR/OD

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Department of State, A/GIS/IPS/SHP

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Blind Memo prepared for Newsom
trip to Arg't (the night club)
in May 1978

ARGENTINA: HUMAN RIGHTS AND BILATERAL RELATIONS

Argentine access to all US security assistance and military sales will be terminated on September 30 on human rights grounds. This is mandated by the Kennedy-Humphrey amendment to the current International Security Assistance Act. In the interim, human rights considerations will heavily influence the US response to pending Argentine requests for training and export licenses.

A current review of Argentina's human rights situation leads to the following conclusions:

- there is no consistent movement toward human rights compliance nor any real prospect for a rapid return to the rule of law;
- an apparent decline in the rate of disappearances since mid-1977 is the most significant positive trend;
- the "disappeared" issue will remain in the forefront, but Argentine officials will not be responsive;
- Argentine authorities understood that the counter-terrorist tactics adopted after the March 1976 coup would lead to human rights problems with the US;
- a combination of priority security concerns and internal political factors have inhibited human rights improvements, even given a much reduced terrorist threat;
- measure progress towards human rights compliance may follow the World Cup soccer games (June) and executive reorganization (August); but
- US actions, unsupported by other governments and private lenders and investors, probably cannot force rapid changes in the present situation.

Department of State, A/GIS/IPS/SRP

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Blind Memo prepared for Neeson
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attached paper is in file (+ 1 copied separately)